

African NGO Participation in Natural Resource Policy Reform

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACTS	African Centre for Technology Studies, a Kenyan non-governmental organization
AID	Agency for International Development (also USAID)
AID/W	USAID headquarters in Washington D.C.
APE	Action Program for the Environment, a USAID project in Uganda
CAMPER	Cameroon Program for Environmental Reform, a proposed USAID project
CARE	a U.S. private voluntary organization
DFA	Development Fund for Africa, a USAID initiative mandated by the U.S. Congress in 1987
ENRIC	Environment and Natural Resources Information Center, a USAID project in Washington D.C.
FSP	Forestry Support Program, a program within the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, International Forestry, with funding provided by USAID
IIASA	International Institute for Applied Systems Research, Vienna
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KENGO	Kenya Energy and environment Non-Governmental Organizations
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NGO	non-governmental organization (used here to denote non-U.S. organizations)
NRM	National Resistance Movement, the ruling party of Uganda
NRM	natural resource(s) management
NRMS	Natural Resources Management Support, a USAID project
OPG	Operational Program Grant, a USAID funding category
PARTS	Policy Analysis, Research, and Technical Support, a USAID project

PNRM	Plan for Natural Resources Management, the USAID/Africa Bureau environmental strategy
PVO	private voluntary organization (term used in U.S. legislation, used here to denote U.S.-based organizations)
PVO-NGO NRMS	a USAID-funded project in Cameroon, Madagascar, Mali, and Uganda
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WRI	World Resources Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines several aspects pertinent to increasing the ability of African non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to contribute toward policy reform in the natural resource sector. Based upon a literature review, interviews in Washington D.C., and brief visits to Uganda, Kenya, and Cameroon during May - June 1993, the report concludes that indigenous NGOs have generally had little impact in policy reform efforts, and that they remain, to a significant extent, marginalized from policy reform activities supported by donors such as USAID.

The African NGO sector has grown rapidly in recent years. A combination of factors such as governmental incapacity and donor encouragement is leading NGOs to take on an ever-increasing array of activities. On the whole, more of the responsibility for development is shifting from governments to NGOs. NGO technical capacity and professionalism have not increased at the same rate, however. Also, as this sector grows, the term "NGO" is being applied to a wide range of organizations including community groups, consulting enterprises, and charities. For-profit and not-for-profit activities are often blurred, while in some cases no such distinction exists in local law or accounting practice.

As a result, there is much confusion about roles and capabilities, standards and accountability, and even legitimacy. This can hinder donor efforts to work more closely with NGOs: donors often don't know who to work with, or through what mechanisms NGO activities should be financed, monitored, and evaluated. In addition, there remains considerable skepticism among governments, donors, and even to some extent within the ranks of African NGOs, concerning the ability of NGOs to play a useful role in policy reform. Reasons for this include:

- the perception of NGOs as low-cost implementors of field activities with little if any capacity to address policy issues involving complex technical and economic problems;
- donor reluctance to fund analytic research capacity within African NGOs, thus perpetuating their role as implementors of activities conceived by others; and
- governmental reluctance to open the policy-making process to a broader base of participation, coupled with official perception of NGOs as potential competitors to be monitored and controlled.

Policy reform has become a major component of activities in the field of natural resources management. However, much of the present policy reform work appears to reflect a somewhat limited conception of civil society -- including NGOs -- in the policy process. As a result, NGOs are stereotyped as implementors of activities at the grassroots level, and receive little support for non-traditional roles such as environmental policy analysis or advocacy. In one of USAID's most recent NRM projects, the Action Program for the Environment (APE) in Uganda, for example,

NGOs running community forestry projects are eligible for funding, but NGOs conducting natural resource policy research are not.

Diagnosing policy problems, articulating "correct" new policies, and putting them into place are assumed to be tasks for government and donor agency professionals, even if these are frequently supplemented by public consultations in some form. Once the policy reforms have been accomplished, the NGO community is expected to play its assigned role -- that of going out to the field to introduce improved techniques for resource use and management. This limited perception of the nature of policy reform and lack of awareness of the broader role of NGOs fails to connect with contemporary efforts to make development more participatory, and to expand the "space" for civil society in Africa.

Steady and consistent pressure from donors is needed to ensure that African governments continue the process of strengthening the functions of civil society, including NGOs. Coordination between donors is an important element of this process. The donors, including USAID, need to pay more attention to developing NGO capacity for positive involvement in the policy-making process, not only in the implementing phase. Funding of NGO activities needs to be diversified beyond the present preoccupation with grassroots service delivery. Policy research and public awareness campaigns, for example, are two important areas for NGO involvement in the natural resources and environment sector for which African NGOs currently receive little support.

Programs in support of democracy and governance should be helping to make the case that policy reform is not solely a technical process of introducing discrete legislative changes to bring about a desired effect. Instead, more democratic governance processes need to be developed in order to strengthen the local capacity to assess and modify environmental policies. Furthermore, this should become an on-going activity based upon local expertise and priorities, rather than being dependent upon external consultancies carried out in conjunction with relatively short-lived projects.

NGOs in Africa represent an important building block for the strengthening of civil society. For this reason, it is necessary to broaden the conception of NGO roles beyond the present one of low-cost service delivery at the grassroots level. Analytic and advocacy functions are inadequately served at present; with the proper support, NGOs could play a key role in this aspect of strengthening civil society.

USAID is a key player in both the NRM and governance fields. The opportunity to link these in Africa is unique. USAID's Plan for Natural Resource Management in Africa (PNRM) is a significant effort to help place more of the responsibility for natural resource management in the hands of the resource users themselves. Rather than treating NRM and governance as separate USAID program themes, they should be closely integrated. In addition, the cross-cutting role of NGOs should be explicitly treated in project design and specifically supported in ways

which build upon the lessons learned from USAID and other donor experience in support of African NGO activities.

Donors also need to support indigenous efforts to strengthen NGO associations such as federations or consortia. These can play a key role in establishing standards of accountability for NGOs, and in helping to mediate the crucial relationship between government and the NGO community. This issue should be reassessed where USAID is designing new projects with NGO components, especially in the case of NGO "umbrella" projects.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report examines the potential for strengthening the collaboration between USAID Missions in sub-Saharan Africa and indigenous NGOs in the process of introducing reforms to natural resources policies. It is based upon a desk study analysis of documents available in Washington D.C., interviews with USAID personnel in Washington D.C., supplemented by field visits to Uganda, Kenya, and Cameroon during May - June 1993 where staff of USAID, African NGOs, U.S. PVOs, and other observers were interviewed.

This study was funded under a USAID Africa Bureau program to assess the effectiveness of indigenous NGOs in implementing natural resource policy reform in Africa. This program, implemented by the Forestry Support Program of the USDA Forest Service, includes a number of studies, conferences, and other activities, all aimed at providing a better understanding of the role of African NGOs in policy reform. In addition, the program intends to lay the foundation for closer and more effective collaboration between USAID and African NGOs in this area.

WRI's Center for International Development and Environment, which has conducted numerous studies on natural resource policies in sub-Saharan Africa, conducted the study which is summarized in this report.

II. THE CONTEXT FOR AFRICAN NGO PARTICIPATION IN POLICY REFORM

This report assesses the potential for increasing African NGO participation in the process of reforming natural resource policies in Africa. This concept is related to several trends which have become significant influences upon development thinking in recent years:

- an increasing interest in environmental issues in developing countries, including sustainable management of natural resources for long-term economic development;
- the belief that unsustainable resource use and environmental degradation are in part the consequence of public policy failures;
- an evolving consensus that the participation of local groups in making decisions that affect them is essential for sustainable development;
- a down-sizing of the public sector, often as a result of structural adjustment programs, and increased emphasis upon the roles of the private sector and of NGOs in national development;
- an increasing tendency to link bilateral development assistance with concepts such as democratization, improved governance, respect for human rights, and economic liberalization.

These trends have become a significant influence upon development planning and foreign assistance, and although they are not uniformly present in every country of sub-Saharan Africa, it is evident that most of the continent is now feeling the impacts of these ideas.

From the perspective of development ideologies as these were debated during the 1970s, the above trends may appear at times to represent somewhat contradictory impulses. For instance, many economic liberalization measures now being enacted in Africa, including deregulation of exchange rates, lifting of price controls, and a narrowing of the public sector's role in economic activity, have long been advocated by conservative economic theorists.

This portion of the agenda for reform in Africa reflects a viewpoint characterized as "getting the prices right." From this standpoint, one of the fundamental problems of development is the existence of policies which inhibit the free play of those market forces which could engender economic efficiency and growth. Improving the policy framework therefore requires loosening such restrictions and allowing markets to operate efficiently.

On the other hand, the movement toward increasing the level of local participation in development owes much to the earlier work of critics of market-led development, such as Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire, whose influence on contemporary development thinking should not be underestimated. For example, important contemporary techniques such as rapid rural appraisal

and participatory rural appraisal which are associated with the work of Robert Chambers among others, have been significantly influenced by Freire's ideas of "consciencization" (Chambers 1983, p. 73).

Many development thinkers have noted the persistence in developing countries of structural inequities which give rise to a "culture of silence." One advantage of participatory methods is that they enable the poor to identify their problems and to take action in their own behalf. Far from seeing development as simply a question of "getting prices right," this perspective emphasizes that justice -- in social, political, and economic terms -- is a prerequisite for sustainable development. If the need for reform is a consequence of the persistence of unjust systems, then empowerment of the poor becomes central to a meaningful program of reform. In the words of an NGO leader from Zimbabwe, Sithembiso Nyoni:

...outsiders alone cannot remove those roots of poverty which have become so deeply embedded in the structures of society. The poor will need to dig out these roots themselves. All the outside can do is provide the poor with the means and support to constantly remove any bottlenecks and to eliminate those factors which sustain the poor people's condition of underdevelopment (a condition which originates from outside the poor community). (Nyoni 1987, p. 55)

Since the mid-1980s a significant cross-section of African development thought appears to have internalized important components of both of the above paradigms by accepting both the need for economic liberalization as well as equity-targeted reforms. To some extent, debate over the relevance of Western neoclassical economic models appears to have given way to a pragmatic acceptance of many of their principles, although with the caveat that development must not be based upon unsustainable patterns of growth.

A sample, by no means exhaustive, of influential African policy statements illustrating this trend includes:

- *The Enabling Environment Conference: Effective Private Sector Contribution to Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Nairobi, 1986);
- *Africa Leadership Forum: The Challenges of Leadership in African Development* (Ota, Nigeria, 1988);
- *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Participation* (Arusha, 1990); and
- *African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-economic Recovery and Transformation* (Addis Ababa, 1991)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to further examine this apparent convergence. However, in addition to these two approaches toward policy reform in Africa, which may be termed "reform for efficiency" and "reform for empowerment," respectively, a middle ground exists which accepts the need for elements of both approaches. Indeed, movement toward such a synthesis was predicted during the 1970s, by several economists associated with the World Bank, (e.g. Chenery, Ahluwalia, and ul Haq). "Growth with Equity" or "Redistribution with Growth" now appear to be widely accepted ideals for development within Africa even if the Bretton Woods institutions continue to be identified with a more orthodox approach.

However, it is not yet clear that consensus in the abstract has been accompanied by tangible progress toward sustainable development in much of Africa. Furthermore, the combination of economic stagnation during a period of rapid population growth has brought serious environmental problems. In particular, soil erosion, deforestation, damage to watersheds, and loss of biodiversity pose ominous and long-term threats to the agricultural resource base upon which sub-Saharan Africa depends so heavily.

One important aspect of the problem has clearly been the poor performance of the public sector in guiding investment and development initiatives since independence in most African countries. As a result, many of today's policy reform initiatives are directed toward improving the efficiency of public sector institutions. However, the issue of the government's role in development goes beyond issues of efficiency. Korten has identified more subtle aspects of the central government's domination of the development agenda:

Channeling official development assistance predominantly, if not exclusively, through central government contributes to strengthening the institutions of central government over those of localities and the private sector, reinforcing anti-developmental social values, and concentrating control over national wealth in the hands of those who control government. (Korten 1987, pp. 146-147)

This report assesses the potential for closer collaboration between a major bilateral aid donor, USAID, and African non-governmental organizations working in the natural resource sector, specifically in the area of policy-making. The purpose of this collaboration would be to make the policy process more open to the voices of Africans at the grassroots level - the resource users themselves - in order to better reflect local-level concerns, perceptions, and priorities in the decision-making which affects patterns of natural resource use.

Such an approach serves the function of "reform for efficiency" by providing government planners and decision-makers with better linkages of communication and feedback, thereby improving the information basis for policy formulation. In the context of economic liberalization reforms, this will strengthen the ability of Africa's private sector to stimulate economic growth.

At the same time, integrating grassroots groups into the policy process serves the function of "reform for empowerment" by addressing two central problems of African governance:

excessive distance between state and society, and lack of accountability for governmental decisions and actions. By helping NGOs to become more active in policy formulation, civil society is strengthened and government decisions become more transparent and more accountable. As a result, those who previously had little say in decisions affecting them can begin to exert more control over their own lives.

Taken together, these objectives may contribute toward development which is both more dynamic and more sustainable, and which serves both equity and efficiency goals. This report examines what progress has been made in strengthening the role of African NGOs in natural resource policy reform, and how USAID can facilitate this process through its programs.

III. THE PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING PROCESS IN AFRICA

Structural Problems of the African Public Sector

Studies of the policy-making process in Africa are not abundant, and in any case it can be misleading to generalize given the wide range of situations and experiences between countries. Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent the concepts and principles of political analysis, developed primarily in industrialized societies, may be usefully applied to policy-making behavior in Africa. Hyden (1983) argues that many of these concepts are of little help in understanding African policy-making. Most of these models are based on a paradigm in which the governed, as well as the policy-makers, are understood to exist within a single system whose structure and functions are described by the model. In contrast, large segments of the population have effectively "exited" the system in African societies (Hyden, pp.70-71) and much of government is effectively irrelevant.

Scholars have long debated the nature and origins of Third World dualism (in economic terms) and "soft states" (in political ones); this literature will not be reviewed here (see Migdal 1988 and Paul 1983). An eloquent account of the process by which African societies were placed on a path of nation-building fundamentally alienated from their historical and cultural roots is provided by the historian Basil Davidson (Davidson 1992).

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa have often tended to react defensively when their policies come under critical scrutiny. In fact, the act of challenging the content of a given policy has sometimes been perceived instead as a challenge to the government's right to govern. This confusion over roles and responsibilities is closely linked to the governance issue. It also helps explain why NGOs have yet to play a significant role in policy-making in most of Africa.

Where the state views its own position as uncertain, it is fearful of challenges to its authority. Ethnic rivalries and lack of experience with democratic forms of government are frequently cited to rationalize the African state's unwillingness to tolerate robust expressions of differences in the political sphere. The belief that a strong central authority is essential for these reasons may account as well for the relative concentration in many African states of powers within the executive branch of government, at the expense of the legislative and judicial branches. Similarly, the African private sector (including NGOs) has often been marginalized.

Although specific cases vary, it is apparent that African states are characterized by a systemic governance problem. Göran Hyden has observed that African governments are poorly integrated within society, a fact which has implications for policy initiatives in rural areas.

...African countries are societies without a state. The latter sits suspended in 'mid-air' over society and is not an integral mechanism of day-to-day productive activities of society... Because the state is structurally superfluous from the point

of view of the individual producer, it is not difficult to see that the peasant experiences any public policy aimed at improving his agriculture as a 'foreign' intervention. (Hyden 1983, pp. 7-8)

Since independence, most African governments have continued to operate along administrative lines imposed during the colonial period. Since these imported political forms did not develop through the normal process of historical evolution within the context of a particular society, the result has generally been the divorcing of civil society from the machinery of government described by Hyden. One consequence of this is the notable absence of a basic consensus regarding political legitimacy in many countries. It is precisely the absence of this consensus which provokes much of the suspicion with which government views criticism. Another consequence of the colonial history of African political systems is a widespread sense that government is, in many instances, rather irrelevant to the daily life of the people, especially in rural areas.

Many countries in Africa are now undergoing a transition to more open systems of government, and it is likely that this opening process will also permit a significant range of new opportunities for a wide range of NGOs. On the other hand, it should also be expected that "backsliding" may occur here and there as various forces struggling to define the new system make gains or experience setbacks. The repudiation of economic policy reforms by Kenya's President Moi in March 1993, at around the same time that the new, democratically-elected Government of Zambia was threatening to crack down on political opposition, is an effective reminder that movement will not always be in a consistent direction.

In the same way, relations between governments and NGOs may undergo dynamic changes, many of which may be positive. In Ethiopia, for example, the new government has reportedly adopted highly favorable policies toward NGOs and toward improving the management of natural resources. This country, long-wracked by civil war and with a history of political manipulation of NGOs, now appears to be one of the more promising sites for work in the NRM sector in sub-Saharan Africa (Brown et al., 1993). On the other hand, political tensions in Togo, Malawi, and Cameroon, countries favored by donors during the 1980s, have led many agencies to suspend their programs there pending political reforms.

Bratton sees such trends as reflecting a natural process which eventually is likely to lead toward more stable accommodations between governments and NGOs:

In Africa, both the centralized States and the developmental NGOs are relatively new structures and the limits of their popular support and managerial capacity have yet to be fully tested. We can expect relations to swing back and forth as each side probes to discover a workable set of interinstitutional arrangements that suits African conditions. (Bratton 1987, p.585)

Yet progress on the fundamental issue of political legitimacy is arguably a key determinant of the long-term prospects for strategies for sustainable resource management based upon participatory modes. It is often the local resource users who are most alienated from existing political structures. Where they view government with indifference or hostility, the task of maintaining a productive dialogue between such groups and policy-makers will be fraught with difficulty. As one African NGO leader observes:

...in the current circumstances, popular participation in development cannot be elicited without alarming those governments that know they would not be in power if the people had a choice in the matter. The question becomes one of empowering the people without giving them the chance to choose their own leaders, set their own objectives, organize things their own way, and in short, choose their own economic, social, cultural and political options.... It is therefore clear that popular participation both in terms of form and objectives is a political issue and no purpose would be served by tackling it technocratically. (Ndiaye 1991, p.1)

For this reason, the intermediary role played by NGOs may become a critical one in states which have begun to seriously grapple with attempts to make development in rural areas more participatory and sustainable in both economic and environmental terms. This is so because in many such cases, progress on deeper issues of political legitimacy is likely to lag, sometimes significantly.

The search for ways of giving a voice to disenfranchised rural dwellers has a long history. According to anthropologist Cyril Belshaw, it is a fundamental issue which must be faced by development practitioners in all areas of the world:

...the basic policy task is one of creating political structures through which rural people can express their wishes, enter into bargains with wider regional or national institutions, and, above all, resist.
(Belshaw 1976, p. 64)

Resistance to misguided or unjust policies is a time-honored tradition, and for many African NGOs the advocacy function may be the most likely avenue toward participation in the public policy process for the near future. The majority of NGOs continue to lack the technical expertise to produce research and analysis of an acceptable professional standard. However, the goal of developing a base of support among resource users, and accountability to them, is within the reach of many African NGOs today. Thus, the way forward for many NGOs concerned with natural resource policy may be through advocacy, protection of the rights of indigenous people, for example, or drawing attention to the negative consequences of existing policies and pressing for reforms. Indeed, this process, which is already visible in many countries, is likely to accelerate over time.

The Process of Environmental Policy Change

Barbier (1989) distinguishes between different categories of policy changes which can provide incentives for sustainable development: "user-enabling incentives," "policy-enabling incentives," and "variable incentives" (Barbier, 1989, pp. 201-202). User-enabling incentives focus directly on resource users, for example by changing tenurial systems or permitting greater participation by local people in decision-making. By contrast, policy-enabling incentives focus on policymakers and policy implementers, for example, by strengthening or reforming government institutions, or changing their legal mandates or administrative procedures.

Finally, the term "variable incentives" denotes pricing adjustments which may bring about desired changes in the behavior of consumers and producers, through changes in taxes, subsidies, or exchange rates, for example. Many initiatives in the natural resources sector have been of the "policy-enabling" type. USAID and other donors have financed programs to strengthen or streamline public sector institutions, for example by providing technical training and support to forestry agencies while also trying to redefine their roles, and to improve their interaction with resource users.

Efforts to reform land or resource tenure policies - "user-enabling" policies - have been generally less typical, though present trends suggest some movement in this direction. For instance, a number of current USAID NRM programs in sub-Saharan Africa are linked to policy changes of this type, e.g., the revision of Niger's *code rurale*.

In far fewer cases have African governments made much progress in modifying "variable incentives," even where it is apparent that reforms to tax, pricing, and subsidy policies could have beneficial effects on patterns of natural resource use. In the Central African Republic, for example, government tax concessions allow timber companies to continue operating even though returns are below the break-even point. By eliminating these tax concessions, resource use could be placed on a more realistic and sustainable basis (R. Carroll, per. comm., 1993).

Many such policies have been in place for decades and may not have been changed since colonial times. For example, Sudanese timber royalties have been assessed at a flat rate for some forty years, during which time their significance as a proportion of the production cost of charcoal - and thus their "variable incentive" effect - has declined to nearly zero. The Sudanese government (like others in Africa) has occasionally attempted to cope with the charcoal/deforestation problem by alternatively banning it (to no effect) or imposing ineffectual restrictions on sales and/or transport.

Although economists object that government acts of this type tend to badly distort market signals and result in inefficient allocation of resources, it may be very difficult to introduce more

effective measures. Important political and economic interests may be at stake, and harmonizing these with broader interests such as conservation can often be a laborious process.

Barbier also notes that working with only one set of incentives is seldom likely to yield the desired result: multiple policy instruments are needed (and this assumes that there is clarity about the policy objective being sought). Unfortunately, research on the complex linkages between changes in incentives, behavior of resource users, and environmental effects is in its infancy. Uncertainty about the effects of any proposed set of policy changes inhibits the development of integrated approaches to resource management:

In general, the current state of research is simply not adequate to pronounce on the nature of the linkage from producer price to agricultural supply response to natural resource effects to engender confidence over the design of appropriate incentives and investment strategies. (Pearce, Barbier, and Markandya, cited in Barbier 1989, p. 202)

From the standpoint of the participation of African NGOs in environmental policy reform, this somewhat gloomy finding nevertheless has its positive aspects. Echoing Ndiaye's statement (p.16, above), the design and implementation of more sustainable natural resource policies in sub-Saharan Africa is not primarily a technocratic issue, but a cluster of social, political, and economic ones. In this respect, indigenous NGOs may have much to offer in finding workable accommodations between national priorities and local needs, and between competing demands for conservation and economic growth.

To the multiple policy instruments prescribed by Barbier, there can be little doubt that the addition of an expanded role for the African non-governmental sector would offer great advantages, even though NGOs presently remain marginalized from the policy process. This issue is briefly discussed in the following chapter, "Tools and Techniques Used by NGOs to Influence Policy."

IV. TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES USED BY NGOS TO INFLUENCE POLICY

Covey (1992) analyzes various ways in which NGOs in developing countries may involve themselves in policy: (1) as innovators of new development approaches; (2) as a "watchdog" protecting the interests of grassroots groups by monitoring government activity; and (3) as "bridges" promoting cross-sectoral solutions to problems. The policy functions of NGOs can thus vary considerably. In addition, NGOs can choose between numerous strategies for interaction with government: collaboration; education; persuasion; litigation; and contestation (Covey 1992, p. 1).

Covey's typology describes a continuum of approaches which NGOs may use in interacting with the policy mechanisms of the state, ranging from a close and cooperative relationship with government at one end, to a more adversarial stance at the other. Examples of each of these approaches can be found in various parts of the world. From the perspective of this study, however, the question is which of these approaches have been used in sub-Saharan Africa, and with what effects.

In contrast with the important role that was historically played by voluntary organizations in the development of capitalism and democracy in the West, Hyden describes the African NGO sector as unusually weak, even by Third World standards (Hyden 1983). More specifically, NGO policy influence in Africa has generally been "extremely modest" according to Bratton (1989). Only in a handful of cases have African organizations, notably the stronger farmers associations, been occasionally able to articulate a coherent policy position on behalf of the constituency to which these NGOs are accountable. Such situations have been rare, since African governments willing to hear policy advice from NGOs have been as scarce as NGOs capable of providing it.

Certain forms of association, such as farmers' groups and womens' groups, are sometimes linked with a political party, and in extreme cases are directly controlled by the state. This kind of relationship makes the group little more than an instrument for expressing government views and policies, rather than a vehicle for changing them (although in principle communication could flow in both directions). In addition, most NGOs have not yet developed the technical sophistication typically seen as a prerequisite for meaningful policy contributions, and furthermore, their lack of accountability to an organized membership base has also undermined their credibility in the eyes of government (Bratton 1989; 1990).

Finally, donors themselves have been slow to recognize the potential role of NGOs in policy formulation, focusing instead on NGOs as implementation agents for development policies and programs established by others, especially governments and the donors who finance them.

In principle, as NGOs develop and gain confidence, skill, and capacity, they could serve as intermediaries in the policy process. For example, they could help to communicate the potential implications and impacts of new policies upon segments of the population which lack

the opportunity or the means to do so directly. However, to move in this direction, NGOs must expand their technical competence as well as their political credibility (with government) and accountability (to the public). At present, each of these areas seems to pose serious constraints to a greater role in the policy process for African NGOs.

The field visits conducted in the course of this report tended to confirm the view that African NGOs have yet to establish themselves as significant actors in the policy sphere even though the NGO sector is becoming more important than ever in other respects. This finding is noteworthy given that in both Uganda and Cameroon, the government has, by and large, accepted that NGOs will play a greater role in the future. In both countries, the number and scope of indigenous organizations is growing rapidly. In Uganda, the rising fortunes of NGOs are linked at least in part to the decentralization strategy being implemented by the ruling National Resistance Movement party. In Cameroon, pressure from donors has probably been a more important factor.

In both countries, budgetary pressures are another significant influence pressing governments to accept a greater role for NGOs and community organizations. Because of severely limited operating budgets for government agencies, notably extension services, NGO activities have become an increasingly important presence in local communities. Governments and donors are beginning to accept this reality by allocating increasingly important project implementation responsibilities to NGOs.

Although the post-colonial histories of Cameroon and Uganda are very different, similarities extend to the perceived role of NGOs and their prospects for participation in policy reform. In both cases, NGOs continue to be viewed as unlikely actors in the policy sphere, not only by government officials, but also to some extent by donor agencies and even by the NGOs themselves. In neither country was any instance reported in which an indigenous NGO had played a key role in bringing about a substantive policy change (although one U.S. PVO was said to have influenced Ugandan policy in the area of child welfare). NGOs in these countries tend to describe themselves as irrelevant to the policy process at present.

Even in Kenya, whose NGO community is older, larger, and better established than in the cases of Uganda and Cameroon, NGOs are said to have had little policy impact to date. The NGOs are often fragmented and spend much of their time "putting out fires," and hence have not been able to approach policy-makers with clearly-articulated positions and a plausible claim to speak for a larger constituency. Furthermore, rapid turnover among government officials, particularly at the Cabinet level, has impeded the development of those personal relationships which can be crucial in influencing the policy process. In some cases, Kenyan NGOs have helped to draft Cabinet papers, but these have yielded little tangible result, or have been ignored altogether (pers. comm., G. Arum, 1993).

According to the African Centre for Policy Studies (ACTS), based in Nairobi, more positive results are possible where a longer-term approach is adopted, for example, through

efforts to educate policy makers or to foster a new consensus on issues by convening a series of seminars on selected policy issues. If attended by government officials, university scholars, NGO executives, and community leaders, these seminars enable a wide range of views to be heard and discussed in a non-threatening atmosphere which can help to improve the "enabling environment" for policy change. In similar vein, *ad hoc* commissions of eminent persons have been instituted to hear opinions on matters of local concern, e.g., land tenure and proposed legislation to address land-related issues.

Such approaches have been slow to result in concrete results, however; in part, this may be because government officials are more interested in using such NGO-sponsored activities as ways of gathering information than as sources of policy advice.

According to one observer of NGOs in Uganda, another reason for the limited scope of activity in this regard arises from the circumstances by which many African NGOs are established. Often they are founded by, or through the influence of, an individual politician or other "notable person" whose motivations for establishing an NGO typically are two-fold. First, the NGO affords a conduit for assistance to this individual's home village or region, thus serving the purpose of altruism as well as that of public relations. Second, it can help to build political influence and extend patronage through the NGO's hiring practices as well as access to project resources such as vehicles. In such cases, activities such as policy research and advocacy may be of less interest than other activities which can more directly contribute to the interests of patronage and self-help.

In both countries, the concept of NGO participation in policy reform frequently evoked the response that "lobbying" and "pressure tactics" are Western techniques inappropriate to African societies. Although Covey identifies five distinct modes of NGO interaction with government (see above), most observers interviewed in the course of the field visits tended to perceive NGO options as limited to cooperation with government, on the one hand, and confrontation, on the other. Most observers stressed that confrontational tactics would be counterproductive in African countries, thereby implicitly limiting the possibility of an NGO role in policy reform.

This situation is, in part, a byproduct of the broader problem of civil society in Africa, and relates to the defensiveness and sensitivity of governments previously noted. To bring African NGOs into the policy-making process therefore requires a shift in assumptions about the options legitimately available to them. To accomplish this requires an expansion of the "space" within which civil society operates. Fortunately, this process is already underway, and is contributing to the rapid growth of the NGO sector in both Cameroon and Uganda. Although it is evident that much remains to be done to expand the range for open discussion and promotion of alternative views and policies, particularly in Cameroon, it is equally clear that the political climate of today is considerably more open than in the past.

It is also apparent that the NGO community has far to go to develop the credibility, accountability, and skills necessary to participate effectively on the policy level. Developing credibility and accountability is at least as important as developing specific tools and techniques for influencing policy. Some of the issues that must first be addressed are discussed in the chapter "Factors and Conditions for Effective NGO Participation in Policy Reform."

African NGOs will eventually benefit from the rapidly growing movement among donors to emphasize participation in development. Considerable literature has appeared in recent years on the topic of participation: see, for example, Atherton et al., 1992; Bhatnagar 1991(a) and (b); Clark 1991; Cort 1991; Donnelly-Roark 1992; Goulet 1989; Green 1992; Milas 1992; Nagle 1991; Ndiaye 1990; Paul 1987; Thalwitz 1991; and numerous publications by the UN, World Bank, and USAID. WRI's *From the Ground Up* series represents a significant effort to document participatory resource management experience by moving beyond the theoretical level which has often dominated the topic.

As noted above, the trend toward participatory development will sometimes find African NGOs poorly prepared to take on the tasks being steered their way. Yet if participation eventually becomes a fundamental precept of development practice, as now seems likely, African NGOs which are able to respond effectively to these new challenges are likely to prosper, and other NGOs will learn from their example. In the long run, NGOs will undoubtedly play a key role as agents of participatory development. An important aspect of this role will be the ability to participate in the policy-making process.

V. MECHANISMS USED BY USAID TO INFLUENCE HOST COUNTRY POLICIES

The USAID Approach to Policy Dialogue and Reform

Since the early 1980s, USAID has made policy dialogue with developing country governments an increasingly important instrument of the U.S. foreign assistance program. In early 1983, the Administration stated that foreign assistance should be based upon four "pillars:"

- policy dialogue and reform;
- institutional development;
- technology transfer; and
- the private sector.

By virtue of its emphasis on policy reform, the "four pillars" approach marked something of a departure from the "New Directions" mandate which had been passed by Congress in 1973 in an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act. The "New Directions" guidelines instructed USAID to focus its efforts on specific measures that benefit the rural poor majority in developing countries instead of channeling funds toward activities such as large-scale infrastructure projects. The new approach came to be identified with the "basic human needs" school of development, and USAID made significant changes to its operations in complying with these guidelines during the late 1970s.

In contrast, the new USAID strategy articulated during the early 1980s emphasized efforts to improve the operation of markets and other aspects of the "enabling environment." The role of policy dialogue and reform was outlined in an USAID policy paper of December 1982, Approaches to the Policy Dialogue. This document argued that, during the 1970s, USAID had placed insufficient emphasis upon the need to establish sound economic policies in developing countries; without a sound policy framework, the much of the assistance might be wasted. The basic human needs approach was characterized in the 1982 report as well-intended but perhaps misguided: failing to achieve lasting benefits for the poor because of insufficient attention to the macroeconomic context of development.

The 1982 report also noted that the United States had historically emphasized the important role of policy change in its foreign assistance program. Including policy instruments among the four pillars was not a really a new approach, therefore, but a return to earlier principles that had been mistakenly placed aside during the 1970s. An internal AID memorandum of 1968 was cited in the 1982 report, illustrating the policy precedent:

Current AID doctrine holds that the inducement effect of aid on development can be more important than the effect of resource transfers. (E. Mason, 1968, cited in USAID 1982, p.2)

The 1982 policy document described two approaches to policy dialogue: *ex post* -- "good economic performance by the aid recipient justifies financial support;" and *ex ante* -- "the provision of aid is linked to a future policy change." (USAID 1982, p. 3) The *ex post* approach offered a tool for improving macroeconomic performance, while the *ex ante* approach offered the possibility of producing a "beneficial effect through specific microeconomic policy decisions." (USAID 1982, p.4)

The USAID policy paper anticipated criticisms that policy conditionality might become a zero-sum game between USAID and the host country government, with one side "winning" and the other "losing." Instead, USAID made the case that policy dialogue should be understood as a positive sum game, in which both sides benefit from the outcome. In other words, both parties have as their objective better economic performance in the recipient country, and agreeing on a suitable mix of policy instruments would further this objective.

As a rule, USAID conditionality would be coordinated with the activities of other bilateral donors and particularly those of multilateral institutions, notably the World Bank and IMF. Although the USAID policy document identified situations in which the possibility of divergent approaches could exist, it was clear that in general, a coordinated approach toward policy reform would be preferred, and that the U.S. would use its influence within the multilateral agencies to seek it (USAID 1982, pp. 18-21).

The 1980s saw a major expansion in the use of stabilization, structural adjustment and sectoral adjustment programs by multilateral agencies. As governance and democratization have become more prominent issues for Africa, USAID and other aid donors have broadened the scope of "*ex post*" conditionality, moving beyond economic performance to also include respect for human rights and movement toward democratic governance as criteria for aid. Countries which have shown little interest in such reforms have, in several cases, experienced a reduction and even the termination of U.S. assistance. In several countries where political trends are ambiguous, USAID Missions have adopted a "wait-and-see" attitude.

Yet by some accounts, the vigorous manner in which USAID reintroduced policy conditionality into its programs may have outpaced the ability to use this instrument to best advantage. For example, where IMF and World Bank adjustment programs were already imposing unpopular conditions upon the host country, USAID may in some cases have associated itself with a "blunt instrument." A USAID assessment in 1987 called for a more selective approach to the use of policy dialogue:

Too much emphasis has been put on using leverage and "policy dialogue" to ensure that officials make "the right decisions." In our opinion, the emphasis should be instead on developing a policy dialogue process that enhances a country's capacity for good policy research and analysis, thereby improving decision-making by a country's own policymakers. (Johnston et al., 1987, p.114)

In other words, the approach toward policy reform should avoid the appearance of dictating decisions, and should instead focus on improving the "enabling environment" - strengthening host-country technical and policy capabilities, and improving governance and accountability. Such an approach would be more sustainable and more likely to be implemented than one that insisted on the adoption of an externally-derived "package" of reforms.

USAID natural resource activities in Africa are guided by the Plan for Natural Resources Management (PNRM), as well as by Congressionally-mandated guidelines included in the Development Plan for Africa (DFA) since 1987. The PNRM identifies four regions within sub-Saharan Africa as priority areas for natural resource management activities: the arid and semi-arid tropics, tropical highland areas, the tropical moist forest of the Congo Basin, and the island of Madagascar. The DFA has four strategic objectives:

- Improving management of African economies;
- Strengthening competitive markets;
- Developing the potential for long-term increases in productivity; and
- Improving food security. (USAID 1992, pp.8-21.)

USAID works to promote policy changes which will improve the "enabling environment" within which other development investments take place. Policy considerations thus reflect a key theme of USAID programming in sub-Saharan Africa, continuing the trend begun in the early 1980s. By Congressional request USAID is expected to target 10 percent of DFA funds toward activities supporting improved natural resources management (ENRIC 1992, p.39).

As of 1992, USAID was supporting environment and natural resources policy reforms in twelve countries of sub-Saharan Africa (ENRIC 1992, p.32). Beginning in 1987, the Africa Bureau provided technical assistance to Missions through the \$28 million NRMS Project (Natural Resources Management Support), which was succeeded in 1992 by the \$46 million PARTS project (Policy Analysis, Research, and Technical Support).

During the course of the NRMS project, USAID concluded that the chances for success of any given initiative aimed at improving environmental and natural resources management depended heavily upon the country's macropolicy context. The overall policy framework, institutional capabilities, legal and tenurial factors, and general economic conditions, all play crucial roles. The PARTS project is designed to identify issues and establish priorities in order to guide the three themes of the USAID natural resources management agenda: institution strengthening, improved management practices, and issue analysis (ENRIC 1992, p.45).

The two countries selected for site visits in the course of preparing this report, Cameroon and Uganda, are priority countries for USAID programming although Cameroon has been placed under a partial aid suspension following the controversial national elections in October of 1992. Both countries have important biodiversity resources, and both are considered significant test cases for introducing improved natural resource management approaches in Africa.

USAID presently has a major NRM project underway in Uganda, Action Program for the Environment (APE), and at the time of preparing this report, was preparing a similar initiative in Cameroon. This project, tentatively named CAMPER (Cameroon Program for Environmental Reform) would be similar to APE in emphasizing policy reform together with support for NGOs as ways of improving sustainable natural resource use. These two cases represent fairly well the range of current and proposed USAID programming in the environmental and natural resources sector.

VI. FACTORS AND CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE NGO PARTICIPATION IN POLICY REFORM

It has become a truism that African NGOs, with very few exceptions, lack the technical capacities and the professionalism needed to participate fully and effectively in policy dialogue, even where governments are open to the idea. This assessment was repeatedly encountered in the course of the site visits, and much has also been written on the need for NGOs to acquire the necessary analytical and communication skills, as well as to strengthen administrative and evaluation mechanisms.

On the other hand, there may also be certain risks if NGOs begin to acquire the capacity to influence public policy. Korten points out that NGOs should be wary of taking on new roles too quickly (Korten 1987). Chambers suggests that conventional approaches to strengthening NGOs may undermine the values they were created to serve. Instead, he argues for a form of "people-centered" professionalism which can offer the necessary organizational and technical capabilities without becoming too removed from the needs and problems of the poor in whose behalf the NGOs purport to work (see Chambers, "The New Professionalism: Putting the Last First," in Chambers 1983, pp. 168-189).

If these concerns are valid, the question then becomes how to strengthen NGOs and increase their technical capacity and professionalism in ways which will also enhance their expertise and credibility without alienating their membership base. The concept of NGOs as intermediary organizations, after all, springs from the idea that there is presently too much distance between the citizenry and the agencies of the state. Transforming NGOs into substitutes for state agencies would be a perverse solution if the distance problem persisted.

It must also be remembered that certain public sector functions are legitimate and necessary: not all government activities can devolve to the private sector or to NGOs. Yet some observers fear that too much focus on the needs of NGOs, accompanied by disenchantment over governmental incapacity, has led donors to neglect the public sector at the same time that structural adjustment programs have significantly curtailed the resources available to African governments. In many cases, this has led to situations in which extension services have been brought to a standstill, losing many of their ablest staff to donor-funded NGOs or to international PVOs.

In some countries, only donor-financed programs are able to maintain a normal level of operations, a situation which has led some to see NGOs developing into a kind of "parallel government." As one U.S. PVO representative in Niger commented, *"in this country, nothing is happening in rural areas unless it's funded by donors or implemented by NGOs."* This is a familiar refrain in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The issue of defining proper roles for the African public sector, and arranging proper systems of incentives and management, is beyond the scope of this paper. (See, for example ,

Klitgaard, "Incentive Myopia," World Development, April 1989, on the devastating effects of economic austerity on developing country governments and possible remedies.) However, the continuing decline in public sector capacities certainly poses the threat of pulling NGOs away from the desired intermediary role, and into a "parallel government" role which entails the risks noted by Korten, above.

Fowler identifies five criteria that NGOs should use in developing a working relationship with government: (1) there must be an appropriate legislative framework protecting NGO autonomy; (2) there should be a forum for dialogue with government on policy issues; (3) funding mechanisms should not distort NGO autonomy or accountability; (4) NGOs should carefully examine their relationship with government, i.e., is the NGO role that of "alternative," "complementor," or "substitute" for government? and (5) a strategy for NGO self-reliance is necessary to avoid becoming dependent upon government or compromised by too close association with it (Fowler 1992, p. 8).

At the institutional level, NGOs would benefit from a number of measures to improve their capacity to address issues of public policy. The criteria listed by Fowler serve as a useful guide to the consideration of specific measures, which are discussed below in the context of the site visits in Cameroon and Uganda.

Legislative Framework

NGO representatives in Cameroon identified the lack of a suitable legislative framework as a particularly serious problem. The 1990 Law on Associations is generally seen as an improvement in terms of legal protection of the human right of association and an example of the trend toward greater openness in society following the reforms in Eastern Europe of the late 1980s. Yet the 1990 law makes no specific provision for NGOs, and this omission has become increasingly problematic as new NGO registrations have skyrocketed.

In the absence of specific legislation, government officials have exercised broad discretionary powers to limit the activity of NGOs thought to represent a potential challenge to the government. In some cases, officials have reportedly declined to approve applications for registration of new non-governmental organizations on the grounds that an "organization" is not the same as an "association," and that the new law applies to the latter category only. Such decisions may reflect in part, an attitude favoring local community associations over national level organizations, with the latter perhaps perceived as a more serious rival to governmental authority. Under the current legal and administrative arrangements, officials are not compelled to defend their judgments. Nor are these judgments subject to independent review.

A legislative framework which has the effect of maintaining NGOs in a submissive posture, dependent upon the goodwill of government officials for their very existence as institutions, cannot be conducive to the development of a dynamic NGO community. As finding a balance between the respective roles of NGOs and government becomes more problematic in Africa, a correspondingly greater need will emerge for a suitable legal framework. Such a framework would reduce the burden of proof imposed upon new institutions, minimize the

exercise of arbitrary administrative power as a form of political control, and provide mechanisms for review and appeal.

On a cautionary note, it is important to acknowledge that the "enabling environment" for NGOs entails much more than the mere passage of legislation. The most carefully crafted laws are rendered meaningless in the absence of enforcement; the political will to fully implement announced policies and plans is critical if improvements in the legislative sphere are to have any impact upon NGO effectiveness as development agents. The site visits to Cameroon and Uganda clearly revealed the important role played by the intangible factor of political will at all levels.

Although Uganda's legal framework for NGO registration and accountability is not necessarily superior to that found in Cameroon, the results in Uganda appear to be far more positive. In large part this is due to the energetic implementation of a far-reaching decentralization program by the Museveni government, with its unusual "Resistance Council" (RC) structure which reaches down to the smallest jurisdictions of the country. The interplay between the RC structure and the more conventional administrative apparatus of the government appears to have improved government accountability in many cases, especially at local levels by providing an alternative channel through which to approach the state. Given the weakness of the legislative and judicial arms of government in much of Africa, and the often unchallenged supremacy of the executive, Uganda's parallel administrative structure represents a significant innovation.

Writing about the surprising success of the National Resistance Movement in establishing an apparently stable alternative to Uganda's recent history of strong-arm government, Basil Davidson describes the post-1986 period:

The possibility of civil government instead of executive abuse began to emerge. Genuine moves toward the democratization of executive power thrust up their challenge to despair. It was even as though Uganda's long years of clientelist tyranny had cleared the way for grass-roots political life to push a harvest of renewal up through soil that had seemed irretrievably ruined. (Davidson 1992, p.24)

It is not yet clear how Ugandan NGOs will fit into the national decentralization program or what roles they will play relative to national, district, and community agencies. Yet if the decentralization process and the RC structure continue to provide more opportunities for local initiative and for greater government accountability, as appears to be the case at present, it is very likely that most NGOs will continue to thrive.

In both Uganda and Cameroon, the legislative framework for NGOs could also benefit from the development of clearer guidelines on their registration, for example, by distinguishing service delivery or membership organizations, which have a charitable mission, from profit-oriented consulting firms. The for-profit sector should begin to compete for business by

contracting appropriate types of operations from donors and development projects, while the not-for-profit sector concentrates on development activities less suited to contracting. Both forms of organization have an important role to play, especially as the private sector begins to account for a growing proportion of national output. It is important to be able to properly identify and categorize institutions, if for no other reason than establishing contractual and reporting procedures appropriate to each case.

Forum for Policy Dialogue

Although there is not yet a standing forum for policy dialogue between NGOs and government in Uganda, the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) illustrates a modest effort to begin moving in this direction. It also illustrates some of the political risks inherent in non-participatory policy reform, no matter how well-intentioned.

In the course of developing the Ugandan NEAP, Secretariat staff have invested a considerable proportion of their efforts in nationwide, district-level consultations on environmental issues. In addition, sectoral task forces have been set up to hear views on how various resources, e.g., fisheries, should be managed and which laws and policies need to be changed in order to promote more sustainable management. From the perspective of government as well as donors supporting the NEAP, particularly USAID and the World Bank, this participatory aspect has been an encouraging development that has been implemented in spite of serious logistical and related constraints.

On the other hand, there is an important difference between "consultation" and "participation." Many Ugandan NGOs complain that most of the NEAP consultations have been limited to pre-selected issues with little opportunity for sustained dialogue. Some also note that meetings at the district level do not necessarily reach the resource users who are typically found at the sub-county level.

Perhaps more importantly, the itinerant consultation format lacks the continuity necessary to build relationships in which issues can be fully aired and various alternatives can be explored in depth. From the local perspective, the NEAP consultations offer limited opportunity for serious engagement, and local participants have no idea what will come of their views and concerns once the visitors return to Kampala. To the extent that Ugandan NGOs have been invited to attend specific NEAP meetings, the same objection applies.

Yet in other cases, even this modest degree of consultation has not been achieved, with the result that public support for policies has been seriously undermined. For example, when district councils passed tough new by-laws restricting production of charcoal as a means of curbing deforestation, the views of charcoal producers - many of them civil servants and other well-connected individuals - were not sought. As a result, the regulations have been widely ignored and have failed to curb over-use of timber resources.

Such episodes illustrate an unfortunately common "disconnect" in African environmental policy-making: policies introduced to protect the environment are established centrally, often at the urging of donors, with little grounding in the realities of resource users whose behavior is expected to change. NGOs can play a key role by identifying the gap between policy-makers and resource users, and taking a more active role in the policy process. Doug Hellinger, of the Development Group for Alternative Policies in Washington D.C., makes this point:

The misguided programs and policies of governments and large donor institutions can no longer be left unaddressed by NGOs. The latter should no more confine their attention to grassroots projects than they should quietly participate in projects that are designed by these outside entities without the participation of local populations. Nor can they in good conscience sit by while bilateral lenders and Multilateral Development Banks...infuse their values, interests and perspectives -- uninformed by grassroots knowledge -- into program and policy planning with government. (Hellinger 1987, p.137)

Policy changes which are made at the highest levels with little or no public discussion have come in for wide criticism in Uganda. The government's discussions with the World Bank and the IMF which led to the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program are a case in point: the technical merits of the policy have been eclipsed by resentment that it was imposed without public consultation.

The USAID Action Program for the Environment (APE) project included a condition precedent clause negotiated between the USAID Mission Director and the President of Uganda, raising the protection status of several forest reserves to the level of national parks. This high-level direct contact has been seen as a key factor in the rapid implementation of an important USAID environmental initiative. Ugandan NGOs, however, see it differently, citing what they see as needlessly resettling local residents while imposing new resource management burdens on an agency ill-equipped for the task. According to these observers, input from those affected would have averted most of these problems by identifying alternative means of achieving the desired outcome: better protection and management of an over-exploited forest resource. Instead, the result has been the imposition of an unpopular policy and a public relations problem for the government as well as for USAID.

Returning to Fowler's criteria, most of the problems identified here would be useful topics for dialogue between government, donors, and NGOs. This dialogue should not be limited to "one-off" consultations held when particular issues arise, as in the case of the Uganda NEAP (although these are not precluded). Rather, a standing forum for in-depth and sustained dialogue could prove to be an important channel for airing all sides of policy issues and for ensuring that objections and alternatives have been heard prior to announcement of a new policy.

NGOs desiring to initiate dialogue on policy issues may also find a useful ally in the cadre of technical personnel of relevant government agencies. Often, these individuals are reluctant

to approach senior officials with suggestions for policy changes, despite being well aware of the problems associated with existing approaches to resource management. For instance, these are often the persons sent to seminars on natural resource management in other African countries in which new approaches are being introduced.

For this reason, technocrats may welcome NGO initiatives to put policy change on the agenda, and can help to reinforce their case by providing access to important data such as resource inventories, remote sensing products, or the results of donor-financed studies to which the NGOs would not always have access. The opportunity for building upon such localized "alliances" should not be overlooked in the process of strengthening NGO participation in policy dialogue.

Funding Mechanisms, Accountability, and Autonomy

The issue of funding pervades almost all aspects of donor - NGO relationships, inevitably raising issues of dependence, self-sustainability, and accountability. In both Cameroon and Uganda, USAID has supported NGOs working in natural resources management through a consortium-led umbrella project, the PVO-NGO NRMS project. NGO perceptions of this project, and of broader their relationship with USAID, highlight a serious problem: how to establish funding mechanisms which maintain accountability but which do not undermine NGO autonomy.

In both countries, the respective PVO-NGO NRMS projects are respected for the quality of NRM training and related activity they have carried out. Their coordinators are acknowledged leaders within the respective NGO communities. Yet in both countries, some NGOs complain that the projects were established without local consultation thus undermining national progress to build NGO consortia. Furthermore, the critics see the projects as having interposed themselves between the donor (USAID), and the recipients of assistance (the NGOs), thereby impeding or complicating the flow of information and funds. The loss of direct access to a senior aid agency is strongly felt by many NGOs in both Cameroon and Uganda.

For the long term, it will be important for African NGOs to develop the capacity to raise funds locally, to receive funding directly from international donors, and to become institutionally accountable to a local membership and to financial contributors. This is probably the truest test of sustainability, and thus represents a critical stage in the development of a robust private and voluntary sector. In the near term, however, it is perhaps unavoidable that the majority of indigenous NGOs will continue to be heavily dependent upon access to external resources. As a result, the financial dimension of NGO - donor relationships presently overshadows almost everything else. This condition is likely to persist for some time.

In discussing the future directions these relationships will take, it is important to try to isolate financing from other issues, however, and not to assume that a single mechanism or initiative will be beneficial to every aspect of NGO - donor interactions. For example, the same umbrella project which provides technical assistance and training to NGOs may not always be

the best channel for financing the activities of those NGOs. The act of soliciting funding from a donor almost invariably takes on aspects of competitiveness (vis-à-vis other applicants for a limited pool of resources) or of supplication (vis-à-vis those with the power to award grants or contracts). In both instances, relationships colored by such nuances are arguably not the ideal context in which to provide other important services such as management support, technical training, or other forms of institutional assistance which are badly needed by indigenous NGOs. This can lead to false expectations, frustrations, and jealousies -- a situation which is readily apparent among Cameroonian and Ugandan NGOs now working in natural resources management.

Some of these problems might be avoided by giving more thought in the design of umbrella projects to both the long term and short term needs of the participating NGOs. Also, projects should avoid blurring of functions and services which should remain distinct. These issues are discussed in greater detail in the chapter, "USAID and the NGO Community: Opportunities and Constraints."

NGO Relationship with Government; Strategies for NGO Self-Reliance

The issues of NGO relationships with government and strategies for self-reliance have been well summarized by Bratton (1990), who notes that they are at the core of the problem of institutional development in Africa's NGO sector. Bratton offers the observation that it has become commonplace to recite the institutional improvements needed by African NGOs: improvements in the areas of internal management, financial accountability, planning and programming, and the like. Yet the more significant challenge, in his view, is the need to develop a strategy for defining the program (what the NGO will do) and its external relationships (who the NGO will relate to, and how). These relate centrally to the issues of relations with government and strategies for self-reliance. Bratton's assessment of NGO experience in East and Southern Africa points to several conditions which may enhance the possibilities for participation in policy reform.

First, the organization should represent "a homogeneous and cohesive subgroup." Second, it should be based upon "principles of membership accountability and federated representation."¹ Third, it should focus on a sharply defined policy issue for which it can develop technical expertise. Fourth, the leadership should "cultivate formal and informal ties with relevant political actors, particularly with senior government officials." Fifth, local fundraising should be a priority, especially from the membership, and dependence on foreign funding should be minimized (Bratton 1990, pp.114-115).

The site visits in Cameroon and Uganda revealed a number of problems and opportunities centering on the question of NGO federations or other membership bodies. As the African NGO

¹ although some NGOs, such as those primarily oriented toward research, have no membership as such.

community expands, gains experience, and becomes more stable, one may expect to see the emergence of specialized organizations or bodies which represent their interests to government, to donor agencies, and to the public. Yet the nascent representative institutions such as COPAD and FONGEC in Cameroon, or DENIVA in Uganda, currently exercise very limited roles and appear not to be taken very seriously even by some of the member NGOs.

Such a situation can easily prolong itself in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: because the coordinating NGO bodies have an ineffectual image, little is expected of them, and hence, they are offered few opportunities to accomplish meaningful tasks. One way to move away from this impasse could be to identify specific and appropriate functions for these institutions and to challenge them to carry them out.

From the responses of NGOs contacted in both Cameroon and Uganda, it is clear that many NGO staff harbor ambivalent feelings about NGO federations or membership bodies. They recognize the potential benefits such organizations may bring, particularly in the area of improved relations with government and a stronger voice for expressing common concerns. At the same time, they are apprehensive that these bodies may also become competitors for scarce funding resources. Many smaller NGOs fear that the federations would be in an ideal position to attract external support at the expense of their own members -- indeed, this has already happened in some countries. Donor proclivity for seeking to work through intermediary institutions or "umbrella" projects simply reinforces this anxiety on the part of NGOs.

As donors undertake institution-strengthening programs in the NGO sector, it would therefore be wise to give focused attention to better defining and articulating the special role of coordinating bodies. The USAID experience in working with NGOs is discussed in the chapter, "USAID and the NGO Community: Constraints and Opportunities," along with some thoughts on possible new avenues of opportunity.

VII. USAID AND THE NGO COMMUNITY: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Historic Context

Historically, private and voluntary organizations have been an important aspect of relief and development assistance originating from the United States. Some of the earliest efforts were undertaken by religious groups; for example, the Mennonite Central Committee, established in 1920 to assist famine victims in Russia, was one of the first U.S. PVOs working overseas. CARE, which began operations at the end of the Second World War, represents one of the early institutions established along non-religious lines. The U.S. non-profit sector has been extraordinarily dynamic and diverse. As Fox notes, this sector accounts for some 5% of U.S. GNP, and has produced a rich stream of new organizations and initiatives as public perceptions of issues and needs have evolved: "*Where someone perceives a need, an NGO is likely to follow.*" (Fox 1987, pp. 11-12.)

Privately sponsored relief and development initiatives predated the establishment of an official aid program by the U.S. government, and have traditionally enjoyed strong support from the public as well as from the U.S. Congress. At the same time, numerous pieces of legislation and administrative guidance have influenced the interaction between the official U.S. foreign assistance program and the activities of the private voluntary sector, the "PVO community." Questions of tax-exempt status for PVOs, tax deductions for individual and corporate contributions, and accountability over the disposition of funds and commodities have been at the center of many controversies affecting the relationship between USAID and PVOs. This has been particularly true during periods in which the government has attempted to exercise greater control over such benefits.

In general, however, a fairly stable accommodation has evolved, which maintains a relatively *laissez-faire* stance towards the operations of PVOs, while imposing increasingly stringent levels of accountability upon the use of funds provided by the government. Those PVOs which have chosen not to seek or accept government funding -- notably certain church groups -- continue to operate essentially without official oversight, while those which have employed USAID grants and contracts to augment their programs have as a result had to develop much closer working and reporting relationships with the government.

Certain of its terms may shift from time to time, but the fundamental nature of the relationship appears to be a rather durable and widely accepted "bargain." Deeply-rooted traditional American values concerning individual freedom and limits on the powers of the state may also be important stabilizing factors. In addition, voluntary guidelines developed by the PVO community may have helped to soften the occasional calls for tighter governmental controls which have sometimes been occasioned by revelations of financial improprieties within certain charities. InterAction PVO Standards, published in 1993, are a recent example of self-imposed guidelines applying to some 140 U.S. PVOs (InterAction 1993).

This historical perspective helps explain to some extent the nature of the relationship between USAID and developing country NGOs. The latter have by and large been understood by U.S. officials to represent analogues (however modest in size or capacity) to America's own PVOs. For this reason, these groups have generally been perceived as a very positive element in the development arena, and the U.S. foreign assistance program has long advocated the benefits of a dynamic indigenous NGO sector.

By the same token, the bargain which guides the relationship between the U.S. government and U.S. PVOs has also been applied to indigenous NGOs: to the extent that such groups seek and accept access to U.S. taxpayer funds, they become subject to strict standards of eligibility and accountability. Such standards may be quite different from those applied by other donors, or by the host country government; this, however, has not yet been accepted as a sufficient justification for departing from the long-standing U.S. framework, nor for developing a new one specifically tailored to developing country needs and circumstances.

This last point is becoming increasingly problematic, however, through recent initiatives to strengthen the role of the U.S. foreign assistance program in stimulating greater grassroots participation in national development. In Africa, through Congressional initiatives such as the DFA (Development Fund for Africa) and a variety of budgetary "earmarks" and program mandates, USAID is channeling a greater proportion of its resources toward activities which can deliver demonstrable impacts at the grassroots level. This trend is accentuating the importance of the private and voluntary sector, which is thought to offer a cost-effective means of reaching local communities.

Moreover, at a time when the official U.S. foreign assistance program is coming under critical scrutiny, private voluntary assistance continues to enjoy broad public and Congressional support. Indeed, U.S. PVOs were instrumental in the establishment of the DFA in 1987 (Atherton et al, 1992) and a significant share of its funds are being allocated to them: \$145.5 million in FY 1991, or 18.5% of the total (USAID 1992b), and even higher levels subsequently. The DFA legislation specifically mandates that USAID should work more closely with both U.S. and African groups in carrying out its program:

...the Agency for International Development shall consult with African, United States, and other private and voluntary organizations that have demonstrated effectiveness in or commitment to the promotion of local, grassroots activities on behalf of long-term development in sub-Saharan Africa... (cited in Atherton et al, 1992; p. 1)

This 1990 authorizing language contained an important additional clause, expanding the definition of the "private and voluntary organizations" with which USAID was to establish closer working relationships, by including

...(in addition to entities traditionally considered to be private and voluntary organizations) cooperatives, credit unions, trade unions, women's groups, nonprofit development research institutions, and indigenous local organizations, which are private and nonprofit. (ibid., p. 1)

It would be a mistake to infer from this that the trend toward increasing collaboration with private voluntary organizations has been entirely the result of Congressional pressure upon USAID, supplemented by effective advocacy on the part of U.S. PVOs. The point has already been made that support for the idea of a dynamic NGO sector has been a long-standing U.S. policy position, in part because this idea resonates strongly with core American beliefs concerning private initiative and civic responsibility. In addition, recognition of the role of the private and voluntary sector has gone hand in hand with the strategy of reforming Africa's public institutions and strengthening its markets and private sector.

Furthermore, as USAID staffing levels have declined over the past ten or fifteen years, individual Missions in many countries have correspondingly moved to gradually increase the share of their portfolio dedicated to PVO and NGO activities. For these reasons, the PVO/NGO aspect of the DFA initiative can be seen as the culmination of a longer process, rather than a sharp break from the past.

Yet in other respects the Agency now appears to stand at a crossroads. In addition to facing a potentially wide-ranging reorganization of its structure and programs, the mechanisms by which it interacts with its development partners are coming under increasing stress, with projects and programs being held to ever-tightening standards of accountability for performance. The latter represents a considerably more complex proposition than the past emphasis on financial accountability, and it is not yet clear what are the implications for support to private and voluntary organizations, already hard pressed to comply with the existing suite of guidelines and requirements.

Moreover, the problem may be significantly compounded by the broader NGO definition adopted in the DFA legislation. USAID has relatively little experience of working directly with some of the categories of organizations identified by Congress, and it is likely that the relevance of its procedures and the feasibility of fully implementing them will vary considerably from one case to the next. In addition, budget austerity and staffing reductions further impede the Agency's ability to simultaneously expand the scope of its interaction with larger numbers and more kinds of NGOs, while at the same time developing guidelines appropriate to supporting non-traditional NGO roles such as participation in public policy-making, the subject of this report.

In the past, the relationship between the U.S. foreign assistance program and PVOs (and by extension, indigenous NGOs) was a mutually beneficial one in most respects, though the government occupied the dominant position: it controlled the flow of funds which were the primary *raison d'être* of the relationship. These funds typically represented a small proportion of the total USAID budget, and how they were spent had little discernable impact upon the

overall direction of the Agency. (Conversely, from the standpoint of the NGOs the relationship could be a matter of institutional life and death.)

Partly as a consequence of this situation, there was relatively little pressure from within the government to overhaul and streamline procedures for working with the private voluntary sector, even though problems were widely acknowledged for many years. The relationship was primarily understood as a contracting function, and staff training and administrative guidance followed suit. In a special issue of the journal World Development published in 1987, devoted to the role of NGOs in development, numerous articles described various aspects of this problem and many possible remedies were suggested, of which few if any have been implemented.

The present situation is different. The circumstances of the Agency have changed, and mandates to work through private entities, to strengthen grassroots participation, and to empirically account for its impacts on communities, have all been greatly expanded. Taken together, it is evident that what USAID does is in the process of changing, as well as how it does it, and both of these facts have significant implications for the future relationship between the Agency and African NGOs.

The mechanisms by which USAID has worked through PVOs and NGOs in the past are briefly discussed below. During the course of the site visits for this report, a number of specific problems were identified arising from the ways in which these mechanisms have tended to operate, often with negative consequences for the desired objective of developing a self-reliant private voluntary sector capable of playing a stronger role in policy-making. In addition, a number of opportunities were identified, which may offer at least partial remedies for some of the problems discussed in this chapter. These are further amplified in the final chapter, *"Conclusions and Recommendations"*.

CONSTRAINTS

USAID support for development activities carried out by African NGOs is provided through a variety of mechanisms: umbrella grants, direct grants, Operational Program Grants, and most recently, endowments. These different mechanisms are associated with a number of legislative, administrative, and logistical constraints that inhibit USAID's ability to effectively work with the local NGO community, and can also hinder popular participation in project/program design.

● PVO Registration

The registration process required by USAID is considered by many indigenous NGOs to be unnecessarily intrusive and cumbersome. While there is clearly a need to set performance and accountability standards to justify the allocation of funds, the U.S. - oriented registration process is often viewed as unrealistically complex for African organizations with limited professional

resources and limited access to accounting or legal services. Many NGOs also feel that USAID's registration procedures needlessly duplicate those already required by the government.

Many local NGOs perceive the registration process as an unnecessarily intrusive exercise which calls into question their institutional integrity. NGOs are sometimes reluctant to release their salary information and minutes of board meetings, for fear that this information might become available to others and be used to their disadvantage. Others contend that the system of official USAID registration creates the impression of an elite group of favored organizations (Biddle and Tipper, 1992). This impression is strengthened by the perceived advantage of U.S. PVOs over local groups in dealings with USAID.

● Financial Accountability

The financial accountability requirements of USAID are another factor that can complicate working relationships with indigenous NGOs. The need for NGOs to maintain separate accounting and reporting systems as a condition of USAID funding imposes a considerable burden, often beyond the capabilities of local NGOs. This is exacerbated by the fact that indigenous NGOs do not have to go through the same procedures for other donors, and often do not understand the reason(s) for USAID's requirements. This situation sometimes gives rise to suspicion that the USAID eligibility system is designed to favor U.S. PVOs over African NGOs.

Where USAID decides to work with the indigenous NGO community through umbrella grants, the primary recipient of the grant still needs to be registered and held accountable for all USAID requirements, even though the subgrant recipients do not need to go through the registration process. Nevertheless, indigenous NGOs have reservations about umbrella grants, viewing the primary grantee as a buffer or intermediary between USAID and the local NGOs (which, of course, it is). As a result, much-needed interaction between USAID and the indigenous NGO community is often lacking.

Operational Program Grants (OPGs) allow for greater independence for the local NGOs, but they have a minimum cost sharing requirement of 25%. Most local NGOs are not capable of meeting such a requirement, thus do not qualify to receive OPGs. Endowments allow greater freedom in funding, with the money invested up front in local currency, and the recipient able to use the proceeds during the project. They can, however, also raise other questions. The conditions of the endowment are not always clear, and it is not always obvious on what grounds the local NGOs are being evaluated. Since this mechanism is relatively recent, enough experience has not accumulated over time to draw lessons and determine its overall effectiveness (Forestry Support Program *et al*, 1992).

Congressionally-imposed procurement restrictions limit the use of USAID funds for purchasing equipment, especially vehicles, even where these may be critical to success of the project. This reduces the effectiveness of USAID's support for local NGOs. Constraints on

moving money, the demands of project cycles, and the lack of incentives to take risks, have led most donors to work with the same conventional institutions they have collaborated with in the past (Hellinger 1987).

● **Institutional Impediments**

There is considerable evidence that USAID does not adequately understand the NGO community and the grass-roots milieu in which it functions. Traditional donor modalities and mentalities are not appropriate for the development of genuine partnerships to support natural resource management activities by NGOs working in Africa. This has led to a pattern of unrealistic project targets in relation to funding absorption capacity, implementation timeframe and technical capacity. There is a tendency by USAID staff to underestimate the complexities and requirements for effective support to indigenous NGO activities.

USAID is often too restrictive in the terms and conditions it applies to local NGO activities. NGOs are not encouraged to operate according to their own priorities and modalities that have been arrived at as a result of their work with beneficiary groups. This limits the ability of the NGO to encourage and be responsive to community participation in project design and implementation. Narrowly defined conditions tend to inhibit the innovative qualities of flexibility, risk-taking, and community orientation that make NGOs attractive partners for USAID in the development process.

In the relationship between USAID and NGOs, there is an inherent inequality with the former "calling the shots." USAID dominates the priority setting of NRM activities, while NGOs have very little influence in this regard. Because most NGOs are heavily dependent on donor funding, they are unwilling to "rock the boat" in most cases. The majority of indigenous NGOs acquiesce to USAID's interpretation of what their roles and functions should be. It is not uncommon to see NGOs "fine-tune" their mandate in order to get USAID funding for their projects.

● **Logistical Constraints**

USAID missions are not well staffed to meet the challenges of working with the local NGO community. USAID staff are overburdened with paperwork (Hellinger, 1987). Designing projects can be a demanding, time consuming exercise which often stretches the capacity of the mission staff. There are often a variety of projects and programs funded by USAID concurrently, and the mission lacks the personnel to undertake meticulous follow-up activities on how these different initiatives are being implemented. This is worsened by the fact that most USAID funded projects are to be found in the rural areas which are distant and not easily accessible. European donors are said to be somewhat better at getting into the field (Hellinger 1987).

● **Political Problems**

Working with local NGOs, especially in the domain of policy reform, raises questions as to the appropriate role of USAID vis-à-vis the host government and the local populace. USAID is an agency of the government of the United States, which (in principle) should be dealing directly with its counterpart -- the government of the host country. Circumventing this traditional route, by working directly with indigenous NGOs can offend political sensitivities. As USAID supports more NGOs in advocacy and policy reform activities, such issues are likely to be raised more often.

OPPORTUNITIES

In spite of these constraints, there are opportunities available to USAID in working with the local NGO community. Some of these are discussed below.

● Registration Requirements

As much as possible, USAID missions should take a less rigid interpretation of the registration process. Flexibility should be exercised by the missions to adjust documentation and measurement criteria to meet the objectives of specific projects. Much less attention should be paid to the details of certification (Otto and Drabek, 1992). Also, registration is often considered a pre-selection for funding. These two issues should be separated.

● Financial Accountability

USAID should endeavor to seek a "middle ground" on matters of financial accountability. Most indigenous NGOs have not yet developed the capacities to implement the USAID procedures. Local NGOs risk distorting their normal path of institutional development by trying to adapt to a highly-specialized, U.S. system. As a rule, application and reporting guidelines need to be simplified.

● Institutional Support

Most African NGOs need guidance and support in project proposal preparation. While some have experience in project planning and in the preparation of proposals to donors for funding, few have ever written proposals for major aid institutions (Hellingner 1987). This is often due to the relative scarcity of their resources and the time-consuming nature of major proposal preparation.

Local NGOs, more than anything else, are in dire need of support for multisectoral, institutional capacity building. Project design, proposal writing, financial management, technical aspects of project implementation are all areas where many NGOs are still found wanting. In fact, this aspect has been a key factor in the poor performance of some USAID projects. Strengthening NGO capacities should go beyond preparing them to be able to submit proposals

for funding and report adequately on the grants received. There is room for USAID to assist indigenous NGOs accomplish more in this domain.

● **NGO Consortia**

African NGOs are increasingly coming together to form associations, federations, and networks. These bodies, which often include international PVOs, are sometimes grouped by sector (i.e. environment) or by agro-ecological zone (i.e. Sahelian area). This trend is inspired by the need to share information and speak in unison on matters of common concern. Though full of promise, these consortia are organizationally young and vulnerable like their member NGOs. USAID can help the consolidation of these bodies by providing capacity building services (i.e. financial management systems, etc.) through the coalitions. As USAID works to strengthen these organizations, it should ensure that their goals and objectives are clearly understood.

There is the lingering apprehension amongst member NGOs that these consortia (given USAID's tendency to work with NGOs through intermediaries) would soon begin to compete with the membership. It is of utmost importance that the formation of NGO consortia be demand-driven (i.e. formed by the NGOs themselves). USAID can serve as a catalyst, a facilitator of the process. Donor instigated NGO consortia risk dividing the NGO community and creating resentment towards the donor. The experience of U.S. PVO membership bodies such as InterAction may offer useful lessons in this regard, notwithstanding the fact that the U.S. case is different in many respects from that of African NGOs.

● **USAID - NGO Partnership**

By teaming up with US PVOs in the execution of projects, local NGOs are provided the opportunity to learn and improve on their institutional capacities. Joint project design and management, with an emphasis on strengthening indigenous NGOs, should be encouraged as much as possible by USAID.

Collaboration with indigenous NGOs should begin from the design phase and continue all through implementation and evaluation. Experience has shown that projects built on NGO experiences and designed through collaborative efforts with NGOs have turned out to be more successful (Forestry Support Program *et al*, 1992). NGOs should be integral partners in elaborating and designing project criteria for NRM-related initiatives. A collaborative design process involving potential project participants is strongly recommended for USAID projects.

Rather than relegating NGOs to the role of implementors of government-designed and controlled projects, there is a strong case for placing greater responsibilities for project design and even for policy-formulation in their hands. It is understood that USAID's institutional needs and

its relations with host governments make it difficult for it to relinquish control of the design of its projects. Yet in its transitional phase especially, this process should be made as collaborative as possible, in a spirit of cohabitation, not confrontation between the donor, government and NGOs. Hellinger (1987) contends that the top-down approach implicit in government-controlled, NGO-implemented projects will at best lead to a situation whereby a project is well executed but lacks relevance to the needs of the poor.

NGOs are considered vital players in the development process because they are supposed to represent the interests of the poor and appropriately identify and address their needs. However, many indigenous NGOs lack this grassroots involvement. USAID should make efforts to identify these "unrepresentative" organizations, because community-level credibility is an indispensable ingredient in project success. Institutions that have involvement with, and credibility in, poor communities are better project partners for USAID and should be supported.

More interaction between USAID and NGOs will be beneficial to both parties. Regularly scheduled meetings to exchange ideas and share experiences will render USAID and NGOs more transparent to each other. Trust building is vital to USAID-NGO relations. When NGOs are trusted to be more autonomous, they have more power to achieve good results. Setting up these frequent forums for USAID-NGO exchanges will go a long way in fostering a healthier mutual relationship. In this vein, more projects that enable NGOs to directly approach USAID are needed. This will help eradicate the institutional barriers that presently characterize USAID-NGO relationships.

● **Staffing Support**

To meet the increasing demands of working effectively with the NGO community, USAID will have to commit more staff to undertake some of the tasks related to this endeavor. NGO support projects are generally staff-intensive, and USAID must be willing to adjust staffing patterns as the need arises. This issue is compounded by the fact that AID/W intends to cut back on staffing levels in the missions abroad. USAID might have to resort to hiring local professionals if the retrenchment plans go ahead. To the extent that these local professionals can "deliver the goods", such a measure would have the added advantage of providing staff already conversant with the local environment and familiar with many of the people and groups with whom they would be working. Developing a cadre of competent local consultants over time will also go a long way to support the sustainability of NGOs and their projects in the long haul.

Whichever way USAID goes, there is the necessity to provide practical training and orientation for its staff working with the indigenous NGO community. USAID staff often have little firsthand experience with the institutional culture of NGOs, and in addition many are not completely familiar with the Agency's own grant mechanisms and regulations for NGO funding. Full-time and professionally trained NGO Liaison Officers are needed to make the most of the relationship between USAID and local NGOs.

● NGO Conditionality

USAID should let host governments know that it has the intention of working with the most capable public and private institutions (i.e. local NGOs) in its projects regardless of the sector in which they are found. Donor selection of, and support for, NGOs as project designers and implementors will go a long way to bring governments to accept NGOs as viable partners in the development process. This sort of "NGO conditionality" will be tolerated by governments if public agencies are not excluded from all the project's components and if considerable amounts of foreign exchange are involved (Hellinger 1987). Donors can withhold project funding (until a change in policy occurs) if government refuses to allow NGO participation.

Donors can also include supportive provisions in their major loans and grants to government. These supportive provisions (e.g. a loan to a government on condition that it converts hectares of forest lands to community management under its social forestry program) not only focus increased attention on specific sector problems, they help strengthen the hand of local NGOs in their working relations with the concerned line ministry (Korten, 1987)

● Micro-level Policy Involvement

NGOs should primarily be involved with policy reform at the micro level, as opposed to the macro level. The former seems better suited to the strengths and experiences of NGOs, especially when it applies to projects that need local level involvement.

To the extent that donors appreciate the distinctive requirements of micro-policy reforms they have the option of directing resources to NGOs to play the catalytic roles in which they have important advantages. (Korten, p.154)

African NGOs should advocate their inclusion in donor policy and program planning so that USAID, and other donor institutions, can arrive at decisions that reflect local realities in their discussions with government.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Non-governmental organizations are becoming increasingly important in the process of development in sub-Saharan Africa. Donor agencies are assigning a higher priority to working through NGOs, at the same time that governmental services are being curtailed, thereby expanding the opportunities and the need for NGO initiatives. As a result, many new groups are being formed, and the scope of their activities is also growing. Some observers believe that the present phase of NGO development in Africa represents one of the most hopeful signs of an eventual recovery from the crisis era of the 1980s.

However, the present evidence suggests that the evolution of more sophisticated roles for African NGOs, such as participation in the public policy process, lags well behind the rate of growth of the NGO sector as a whole. While many new groups are being formed, few have taken up specialized functions such as policy research. Furthermore, even in the environment of political opening which now is spreading across the continent, there remains a distinct ambivalence about the extent to which NGOs should attempt to become involved in policy-making. At present, the policy arena remains by and large the domain of government, except where donors have used their leverage to force an occasional opening on topics and on terms selected by non-Africans.

"The role of government is to govern; the role of NGOs is to implement activities on the ground." This view was repeatedly encountered in the course of the site visits in Uganda, Kenya, and Cameroon. Employees of USAID and other donor agencies, which have often pressured African governments to become more participatory, were among those expressing this somewhat stereotypical view of NGOs.

The rationale for this viewpoint is generally that the complexity of natural resource policy issues precludes a meaningful role for NGOs; policy should be left to specialists (i.e. economists or foresters employed by government or donors) while NGOs get on with the task of carrying out projects at the local level. Within USAID's APE (Action Program for the Environment) project in Uganda, for example, a project which includes a sizeable grants fund to support local initiatives in conservation and environmental management, natural resources policy research by Ugandan NGOs is not eligible for funding, according to the USAID project manager.

Although policy issues are now a major priority for development assistance, donors have yet to invest any significant level of funding in strengthening an indigenous policy research capability in Africa. In fact, by some assessments, Africa's capability in this area may now be in decline, a point noted in a recent meeting of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria:

In Africa many good NGOs are in dire straits. ...the African Center for Technology [Studies] in Kenya has effectively closed; Zimbabwe Environmental Research Organization is also suffering severe financial problems. Both

institutions had collaborated effectively with several of the institutions represented [at IIASA]. (IIASA 1993, p.5)

Funding constraints are not the only impediment to a policy role for African non-governmental organizations. Some NGO representatives expressed a degree of wariness about engagement in policy issues, observing that a "confrontational" approach toward African governments tended to prove counterproductive. To be sure, some NGOs expressed a willingness, and even in some cases, eagerness, to become more involved in policy dialogue, given assurances of support from influential donor agencies. In the absence of such support, it is apparent that governmental commitment to openness and participation is not fully trusted, and NGOs living close to the margin financially are justifiably cautious about venturing into this new and potentially risky arena.

The weakness of the NGO sector can combine with governmental foot-dragging to undermine even energetic efforts by major donors to widen the scope of policy dialogue. In Kenya, for example, IUCN has insisted on NGO participation in preparation of the 1994-98 National Development Plan as a condition for financing the plan's natural resources component. Yet to date only one NGO, KENGO, has received an invitation to participate (pers. comm., G. Arum, May 1993).

Nevertheless, over the long term it seems almost certain that NGOs will increasingly focus their efforts and their resources upon the policy context of their activities. Minear has noted that policy concerns are a logical extension of NGO project activities: as they address the problems of the poor, and the inequities that exacerbate them, NGOs naturally become involved in the public policy process (Minear, 1987). Enhancing the effectiveness of their interaction with governments and advocacy for the poor are key elements of any NGO strategy to curb increasing marginalization and to assume a more central, influential role in the development process.

USAID must demonstrate its commitment to working with, and through, NGOs to achieve better development results. NGOs want to see donors establish more direct contacts with them. The establishment of a USAID - NGO Forum, meeting regularly to exchange information, share experiences, identify opportunities, etc., could be a first step in the right direction. Success at such fora could be extended to encourage broader quadrilateral partnerships between donors, governments, PVOs, and NGOs. The establishment of such a Forum would necessitate the presence of an NGO Liaison Officer in each mission to coordinate USAID - NGO activities.

At the same time, USAID must be careful in selecting the NGOs it works with and supports. It is evident that many organizations in developing countries are essentially posing as NGOs for the purpose of securing donor funds. In order for USAID to more directly involve African NGOs in the policy process, it must be clear that these NGOs have credibility and standing, a proven track record of performance and accountability. The NGO Liaison Officer in each country should be responsible to verify the bona fides of potential collaborators.

USAID should also make governments understand that NGOs are partners (not competitors) in the development process. Donors have the necessary leverage to bring governments to accept the contributions of NGOs in both policy formulation as well as project implementation. Change is always difficult to achieve, and old habits die hard. But USAID (by using a measured carrot and stick policy), working in unison with other donors, can help bring about some of these desired changes.

Donor coordination is vital in this process. Its absence can send mixed messages to governments, enabling those which thrive on ambiguous situations to rule arbitrarily. A recent example of effective donor coordination which helped bring local NGOs into the policy process was in Cameroon, where agricultural marketing in the cocoa and coffee subsector was overhauled, and the Cooperatives Law redrafted.

The Cameroon example illustrates the opportunities for NGOs in policy reform at the micro level. Because of their community-level presence and field experience, NGOs can also contribute to policy changes on such issues as forestry, land tenure, community health, agricultural extension, etc. This is not to say that NGOs are only capable of participating in policies that are "field-related". While the scope of their participation can be broadened to address macro issues with a national focus, it is more prudent (given that policy formulation is uncharted waters for NGOs) to begin with micro-level issues. A step-by-step approach, building on the successes of previous experiences, is recommended.

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ANNEX A. Scope of Work

This study will build on the work of the USAID Africa Bureau, the USDA/IF Forestry Support Program, WRI², the Institute of Development Research (IDR), the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), the Implementing Policy Change (IPC) program, EPAT, InterAction, Date x (PVO Initiatives), and other organizations addressing the issue of USAID and NGO relations for improved natural resources management. The study will examine how USAID can better work with the NGO community and the commercial private sector to make policy-making processes in Africa more participatory. The effort will focus on the role of African NGOs in policy reform, leading to changes in national-level natural resources management policy and legislation and improved environmental conditions. It assumes that:

1. African states will continue to move toward more pluralistic and democratic forms of governance;
2. USAID will increasingly emphasize policy reform measures in its development assistance program, especially within the natural resources sector; and
3. African NGOs will continue to seek to increase their involvement and participation in policy dialogue and reform.

In addition to the favorable political climate (pluralism, privatization) for policy reform and popular participation in Africa, there is also great promise that such information can lead to changes within USAID. A "window of opportunity" exists as a result of the transition period with a new administration more sensitive to environmental issues, and new policy-makers coming on board within the State Department and USAID. The likelihood of reorganizing USAID and reshaping U.S. foreign assistance appears great. The information and critical thinking this work will provide will help U.S. policy-makers better address questions related to the level and form (humanitarian, development aid) of foreign assistance to Africa, as well as better approaches to working with NGOs (USAID/NGO workshops, umbrella grants, institutional strengthening, etc.).

² WRI's Center for International Development and Environment, has long addressed issues of popular participation in public policy dialogue and reform as well as program design and project implementation. In Africa this work has centered around NEAPs and the FROM THE GROUND UP program. The Center is also involved in a collaborative effort with IDR to develop case studies of effective grassroots/NGO experiences in policy reform, and is working with ACTS in Nairobi to develop a training program for NGOs and other private organizations in the most promising techniques and methodologies for working with African policymakers. The Center is also a member of InterAction's Working Group addressing issues of USAID/NGO collaboration.

Methodology

The study will include brief literature reviews, supplemented by interviews, on the following issues:

- a. the tools and techniques that have been effectively utilized by NGOs to influence policy in sub-Saharan Africa;
- b. the institutional needs of African NGOs to enable them to become more effective in policy reform;
- c. the public policy-making processes in Africa, including how African policymakers are most often informed and influenced;
- d. the local, national, and international factors and conditions for NGOs to effectively participate in policy-making;
- e. the mechanisms used by USAID to influence host country policies;
- f. the means used by USAID to work with the NGO community; and
- g. USAID constraints which restrict or inhibit it from working more effectively with NGOs and which hinder popular participation in the design of its programs/projects.

Based on this information, a series of options will be developed to enable the USAID Africa Bureau, REDSO offices, and Missions to better work with African NGOs and to facilitate NGO participation in public policy-making processes.

ANNEX B. Organizations and Persons Contacted

Uganda

Centre for Basic Research Asowa Okwe; Mr. Muririndewa
DENIVA Rauxen Zedriga; J. B. Kwesiga
EIA Ltd. Frederick Brusberg
Forest Department Fred Kigenyi
JEEP Samuel Bagabo
Kigulu Development Group Jonathon Waiswa
Kyani Sawmill
NEAP Secretariat Jim Seyler; Ian Arebahona; Geoffrey Lamtoo; Robert Wabunoha
NYDA Hon. Elly Karuhanga
PVO-NGO NRMS Project David Mununuzi
URDTP Mwalimu Musheshe Jr.
Uganda Thinktank Foundation Prof. Carasco
Uganda Womens Tree Planting Movement Ruth Mubiru
USAID Robert Clausen
World Learning William Salmond

Kenya

KENGO Gilbert Arun; Wahida Patwa
ACTS Phillip Wandera
USAID Mary McVey

Cameroon

ACT Chumbon Patric
Association Pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Abdoulaye Mazou
Professional Womens Association Pauline Biyong
CARE International - Cameroon Michel Verret
CIPCRE Jean Blaise Kemogne
DETMAC Associates Christopher Atang
E & E Consultants Enoh Tanjong
Heiffer Project International (HPI) Moppoi Nuwanyakpa
INADES Formation Cameroon Jonas Mva Mva
JANA International Jean Aubé
Living Earth Sammy Lyonga
Ministry of Environment and Forestry Joseph Besong
Missouri Botanical Garden Porter Lowry II.

Population Services International (PSI) Tim Manchester
PRISERI M. Ngwashiri
PVO-NGO NRMS Project Ada Ndeso-Atanga
SAILD Bernard Ndjonga
SASH Kevin Gumne; Mzeka Paul
Tribus Sans Frontières M. Onambele
UNDP - Africa 2000 Timothy Besingi
United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO)/NEAP Secretariat Joachim Bendow
USAID Ronald Harvey; John McMahon; Elzadia Washington; M. Ambe; Tom Crawford; Daniel Moore; Derek Singer
WWF - Cameroon Steve Gartlan; Manasseh Ngome
World Conservation International (WCI) James (Buddy) Powell

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FSP Bill Helin
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CODEL Caroline Njuki
USAID Tim Resch; Curt Grimm; Tony Pryor

ANNEX C. Bibliography

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